Synopsis for Proposed Research

THE PORTRAYAL OF ECOFEMINISM IN THE SELECT INDIAN FICTION : A STUDY

Submitted for

The registration of Ph.D. Degree in English

Under the faculty of Humanities

SWAMI RAMANAND TEERTH MARATHWADA UNIVERSITY, NANDED

Researcher

MR. SARFRAJ OSMAN SAYYAD

Research Supervisor

DR. MAHEBUBKHAN DULEKHAN PATHAN

Head & Associate Professor

Department of English

SANJEEVANEE MAHAVIDYALAYA, CHAPOLI

RESEARCH CENTER: MAHATMA GANDHI MAHAVIDYALAYA, AHMEDPUR

August, 2023

THE PORTRAYAL OF ECOFEMINISM IN THE SELECT INDIAN FICTION : A STUDY

Introduction:

The term “ecofeminism” was born of the last three decades, which intersects two critical perspectives - ecology and feminism. It liberates political and social construction for those who abhor the designation of nature and women. The word ‘ecology’ derives from the biological science of natural environmental systems. It is a combined movement of socio-economic and biological study to examine how human use of nature is causing pollution of soil, air and water, and destructions of the natural systems which threatens the base of life. Feminism - a complex movement with multiple layers centralizes on full inclusion of women in both political and economic field against patriarchy, exploitation, oppression and violence against women.

Emergence of Ecofeminism:

During the early 1970s, alongside the radicalization of feminism, Ecofeminism emerged. So,in order to explore the theory of Ecofeminism, firstly one needs to lookat the word feminism which follows the discussion of the concept of Ecofeminism. Further, one needs to identify the alleged correlation between the subordination and operation of women and nature. Here, word feminism refers to the access of same rights, enjoyed by men. Feminism does not only talk about equality and rights of women but it also emphasizes upon compassion, respect and understanding from the male counterparts. Throughout the world women have been kept away from their social and economic rights for quite a long time. But in Twentieth century, women have become more aware regarding their desires, sexuality, self-definition, existence and destiny.Revolutionary efforts by women to seek their independence and self-identity all over the world are termed as Feminism by analysts and critics.

Ecofeminism is such a platform which combines feminism and ecological concerns on some common grounds. It argues that the social mentality and attitude that are responsible for the domination and oppression of women are also responsible for the environmental abuse. Ecofeminism examines the ways through which social norms affect gender categories to demonstrate unjust dominance over women and

nature. It questions the hierarchical structure that prevails in the social structure and grants power and dominance to men to control and exploit women and nature.

Definition of Ecofeminism:

Ecofeminism is defined in different ways according to the context in which it is discussed. It is defined as a theory, a movement, a philosophy, and a resistance practice. According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, (2010) "Ecofeminism is defined as a philosophical and political theory and movement which combines ecological concerns with feminist ones, regarding both as resulting from male domination of society". According to Webster's New World Encyclopedia (2013), "Ecofeminism is a movement or theory that applies feminist principles and ideas to ecological issues." From these definitions, it can be assumed that ecofeminism is the outcome of amalgamation of feminism and environmentalism. The theory has been well-defined by several scholars.

Review of Literature

A lot of work has been done so far. on several Indian English novelists in English. The researcher has come across with the following research focusing in eco-critical study and literature.

Kamala Markandeya, a well-known Indian novelist in her *Nectar in Sieve*(1954) has intricately represented through female characters the relation between environmental degradation and women's exploitation, exemplifying the ecofeminist point of view.

Jackson, C., in his research paper titled "Women/Nature or Gender/History? A Critique of Ecofeminist Development.", has recorded feminist scholars like Janet Biehl (1991), Meera Nanda (1991). Bina Agarwal (1992), Cecile Jackson (1993) who pointed out ecofeminist perspective as "ethnocentric, essentialist, blind to class, ethnicity and other differentiating cleavages, ahistorical and neglects the material sphere"

Warren, Karen J. in "The Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism" talks about liberal feminism called "equal rights" feminism, "idealizes a society in which autonomous individuals are provided maximal freedom to pursue their own interests"

Wenzel, Jennifer. Focuses on the women related issues in "Forest Fictions and

Ecological Crises: Reading the Politics of Survival in Devi's *Dhowli*."The paper reflects Mahasweta Devi's attack against the patriarchal exploitation of a woman. At the same time, she also portrays the attack on nature through illegal deforestation.

Research Problem:

The research problem centers around the exploration of Ecofeminist themes in the literary works of Arundhati Roy and Sarah Joseph. The research problem addresses the presence of Ecofeminist themes in the selected works of both authors. It acknowledges the authors' efforts to amplify the voices of marginalized individuals and communities through their storytelling. The study further focuses on the interconnectedness of gender issues, environmental concerns and social justice issues. The research problem recognizes the study's objective to contribute to the broader Ecofeminist discourse by analyzing the selected works of Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy and Sarah Joseph.

Aims and Objectives:

The aims and objectives of proposed research are as follows:

1. To examine and evaluate the elements ofecofeminism in the selected works of Arundhati Roy and Sarah Joseph.
2. To depict the feminine perspective of women characters in the selected novels.
3. To portray the feminist perspective of women who respond as revolutionaries, rebels, socially conscious individuals, advocates of liberalism, rational thinkers, and advocate for equal rights while establishing their own sense of identity
4. To examine the dominant power dynamics within Indian society, wherein women are objectified and positioned as marginalized entities
5. To explore the role of women within the context of the Indian family
6. To comprehend the female psychology in the selected works

Hypothesis:

The selected works of Arundhati Roy and Sarah Joseph demonstrate a resolute commitment to ecofeminist principles such as portrayal of marginalized voices, exploration of the interconnectedness of gender and nature and their critique of oppressive social structures. Through their narratives, both authors contribute to the ecofeminist discourse by shedding light on the often-overlooked intersections between women, nature, and social justice.The themes of the selected worksexplore the empowerment of marginalized voices, the depiction of gendered experiences

within ecological contexts.

Significance of the Study:

The study holds significance in various ways. The study investigates the literary works of Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy and Sarah Joseph.Authors give voice to marginalized section of the society.The study unfolds the depth of ecofeminist themes reflected in the selected works. It also sheds light on the voices of marginalized individuals and communities. It helps to bridge literary analysis with broader sociopolitical and environmental concerns.The study contributes to the discussion on ecofeminism. It can inspire readers to address these issues such as gender inequality and environmental degradation.It can inspire future researchers to study ecofeminist themes in literature.

Data Collection:

Data for the present research work will be collected from primary and secondary sources. The primary sources will be the selectednovels of Arundhati Roy and Sarah Joseph. The secondary sources will consist of research articles published in research journals of national and international repute. In addition to this, websites of different reputed libraries will be consulted along with INFLIBNET and Shodhganga.

Scope and Limitation:

The present study entitled **"A Study of Selected Indian English Fiction from the Perspective of Eco-Feminism"** is limited to the ecofeminist interpretations of the selected novels only. The title of this study focuses term eco-feminism which has immense significance in the recent development in literary criticism. The aim and scope of the present study is single-minded and enclosed by areas of environmental studies and ecofeminism. The present study is confined to the select works as follows:

1. Anita Desai : *Fire on the Mountain*(1977)
2. Arundhati Roy : *The God of Small Things*(1997)
3. Sarah Joseph :*Otthappu- The Scent of the Other Side* (2010)

Research Methodology:

The collected data would be in the form of the primary and secondary sources. In primary sources, include **two** Indian English novels. The secondary sources consist of the reviews, articles, interviews of the writer published in various journals,

magazines and books. The authentic information through internet would be used in secondary sources.By using the descriptive method, it is employed in order to discover the ways in which these writers have presented their views on the notions of ecofeminist study by collecting the data from the selected novels. MLA Style edition IX will be followed for referencing.

Probable Date of Completion:

This research work is proposed to be completed within the time limit as stipulated by the university.

Tentative Chapter Scheme:

Chapter I: Introduction:

Chapter II: An Exploration of Ecofeminism in *Fire on the Mountain*

Chapter III:An Exploration of Ecofeminism in *The God of Small Things*

Chapter IV: An Exploration of Ecofeminism in *Othappu:TheScentoftheOtherSide*

Chapter IV:Conclusion

A Brief Profile: Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy and Sarah Joseph

Anita Desai was born on June 24, 1937, in Mussoorie. Her mother Toni Nime Desai was the daughter of a German businessman and her father, D.N. Mazumdar, was a prominent Bengali businessman. Anita Desai spent her childhood in Delhi and moved with her father to the different cities due to her father's business ventures. She completed her education in Delhi and received a Bachelor of Arts degree in English literature from the University of Delhi. She later pursued a Master's degree in English literature from the University of Bombay. Her first novel, *Cry, The Peacock* was published in 1963. Her works have received many honors and awards like the Sahitya Akademi Award, the Guardian Children's Fiction Prize, and the PEN/Malamud Award. She has been shortlisted for the Booker Prize three times, in 1980, 1984, and 1999. Over the years, Desai continued to produce highly regarded works of fiction. Her notable works are *Voices in the City* (1965), *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975), *In Custody* (1984), and *The Zigzag Way* (2004).

Arundhati Roy is an Indian author, activist, and public intellectual known for her unique blend of literary prowess and social advocacy. Born on November 24, 1961, in Shillong, India, she gained international recognition with her debut novel,

The God of Small Things, which won the Man Booker Prize in 1997. It is the centerpiece of Roy's literary career. It is a semi-autobiographical work that depicts the lives of two fraternal twins, Estha and Rahel, against the backdrop of the socio-political landscape of Kerala. Roy's literary output since then has been limited. Another novel titled *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, published in 2017, which explores complex narratives of characters amidst the backdrop of contemporary India.She is a prominent activist. She has been a vocal advocate on various social, political, and environmental issues, both in India and globally.

She has written many essays and non-fiction works that reflect her activist spirit and deep concern for social justice. Some of her notable essays are*The Greater Common Good*, which critiques large dam projects in Indiaand *Walking with the Comrades*where she spent time with Maoist insurgents in India's forests and documented their struggles.Apart from the Man Booker Prize, she has received various awards for her literary and activist work. She was awarded the Sydney Peace Prize in 2004 for her advocacy on behalf of disadvantaged people.

Sarah Joseph is an Indian author known for her significant contributions to Malayalam literature. Born on March 6, 1946, in Kuriachira, Thrissur, Kerala, India, she has been a prominent figure in contemporary Indian literature, particularly in the realm of feminist writing. She was born into a Catholic family in Kerala. She completed her education in literature and went on to earn a Master's degree in Malayalam literature. Her academic background played a crucial role in shaping her literary career. She is renowned for her powerful and thought-provoking literary works that often deal with themes of gender, social issues, and identity. She is considered a pioneer in feminist literature in the Malayalam language.

Sarah's notable works are *AalahayudePenmakkal* (translated as *Daughters of God the Father*) (1999), *AappuramNjaanUndaakunnathu* (*What I Saw Later*, 1991), *Othappu*(*The Accident*, 1995) and *MainakantePremakatha*(*The Love Story of Mainaka*, 2006).Her contributions to literature have been widely recognized. She has received several awards such as the Kendra Sahitya Akademi Award, Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award and Vayalar Award.

Brief Review of Selected Novels:

***Fire on the Mountain*:**

Anita Desai's novel *Fire on the Mountain*is first published in 1977. The central character of the novel is Nanda Kaul, an elderly woman who lives a quiet and secluded life in a bungalow in the foothills of the Himalayas. She has reserved and contemplative nature.Her life is disturbed when Raka, her great-granddaughter, comes to stay with her after her parent's divorce. Raka is anenergetic and curious child. She is oppositeto Nanda's nature.The novel depicts the generational differences along with the clash between traditional values and modernity. The novel deals with the themes like loneliness, isolation, family dynamics and the changing nature of society. The title of the novel

The title *The Fire on the Mountain*refers to the burning desires, passions and conflicts that simmer beneath the surface, waiting to explode. The plot revels the secrets from the past, a tragic event happened with Nanda's daughter and a long-lost love. Desai presents deep psychological insights of her characters and descriptions of nature.The novel has a rich symbolism.*Fire on the Mountain* is a thought-provoking novel whichdepicts the complications of human relationships, passage of time and memory.

***The God of Small Things*:**

The God of Small Things is a novel written by Indian author Arundhati Roy, published in 1997. The novel is set in Kerala. India, and follows the lives of two fraternal twins, Rahel and Estha, as well as their family and the society around them. The story is rich in themes such as social and cultural hierarchies, love, loss, and the impact of societal norms on individual lives.

The novel explores the intricate relationships of the twins with their mother, Ammu and their aunt, Baby Kochamma. One of the central conflicts of the novel arises from the unconventional love between Ammu and a man from a lower caste, Velutha. This love defies societal norms and triggers a series of tragic events that impact the lives of the characters, leading to a sense of loss, guilt, and the disintegration of relationships.*The God of Small Things* is a novel that explores the intricate interplay of love, society and individual lives against the backdrop of a changing India.

***Otthappu- The Scent of the Other Side*:**

Othappu: The Scent of the Other Side (2010)is originally written in Malayalam and has been translated into English as well. *Othappu* is a term in Malayalam that refers to a ritualistic gesture of prostration. The central character of

the novel is a woman named Kamala, who comes from a marginalized and socially oppressed community in Kerala. The novel depicts the struggles and challenges faced by Kamala due to her caste and gender. The themes in the novel are identity, caste discrimination and female empowerment.Kamala's life is marked by poverty, discrimination and a constant struggle for dignity. She is married off at a young age to a man named Chethan, who is from a higher caste. The novel examines the aspects of their marriage, which is fraught with power imbalances, societal expectations and the harsh realities of their social context.As the story unfolds, Kamala's encounters with various characters, each representing different facets of society, highlight the deep-rooted prejudices and injustices present in their community.

Chapter wise Outline:

The chapter-wise outline has been given below:

Chapter I:Introduction

This chapter deals with the biographical survey of the Indian English writer; Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy and Sarah Joseph. It also involves the three novels by them and the main and secondary themes and states briefly about the ecofeminist approach. The chapter also focuses review of literature and the other aspects related to research like justification, methodology, statement of the problem, aims and objectives and the chapter scheme.

Chapter II: An Exploration of Ecofeminism in *Fire on the Mountain*

The second chapter will have exploration of ecofeminism in Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain*. It will cover the aspects that are related to ecofeminist themes, portrayal of women's roles, natureand the interactions between them. The chapter will focus on Nanda's seclusion in the mountains and her closer to nature. Her interactions with the natural world emphasize the interconnectedness between humans and the environment. The chapter will also consider Nanda's experiences as a widow,the problems of an aging woman and marginalization and subordination of women in society. Nanda's relationship with the mountains provides her with a sense of empowerment and liberation. She discovers a newfound freedom and strength as she navigates her life in the mountains. Nanda's interactions with the natural world

highlight the reciprocal relationship between humans and their environment. Her actions, such as planting trees, showcase a sense of responsibility toward the land and an understanding of the mutual dependence between humans and nature.

Chapter III: An Exploration of Ecofeminism in *The God of Small Things*

The third chapter will have exploration of ecofeminism in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) focusing on the themes- caste, family, social norms, and politic. The chapter will investigate the connection between the characterspersonal struggles and the broader environmental context. It will also focus on the oppression of women with the exploitation of the environment through the women characters like Ammu and Baby Kochammawho face social and familial constraints that limit their autonomy. Similarly, the environment is exploited and polluted due to capitalist interests.It also will focus on the traditional roles assigned to women that restrict their freedom and perpetuate their subjugation. These roles are paralleled in the exploitation and degradation of the environment by industries and commercial interests. The novel explores how the oppression of women and the environment intersect with other forms of discrimination on the basis of caste identity.

Chapter IV: Ecofeminism in *Othappu:TheScentoftheOtherSide*

The fourth chapter will have exploration of ecofeminism in Sarah Joseph's *Othappu: The Scent of the Other Side*. The central character of the novel is Kamala who comes from a marginalized and socially oppressed community in Kerala. The novel depicts the struggles and challenges faced by Kamala due to her caste and gender. The major themes incorporated in the novel are identity crisis, caste discrimination and female empowerment.Kamala's life is marked by poverty, discrimination and a constant struggle for dignity. She is married off at a young age to a man named Chethan, who is from a higher caste. The novel examines the dynamics of their marriage, which is fraught with power imbalances, societal expectations, and the harsh realities of their social context.Kamala's encounters with various characters, each representing different facets of society. The novel also addresses the problem of untouchability and the dehumanizing treatment faced by lower castes.Amid these challenges, Kamala strives to find her own voice and identity. She refuses to accept the traditional roles assigned to her by society and questions the norms that perpetuate

inequality. The chapter will also investigate the connection between the characters personal struggles and the broader environmental context.

Chapter V:Conclusion

In concluding the issues, the chapter would be the summing of the arguments, statements and observations recorded in the earlier chapters. The fact findings of the study will be elaborately discussed and analyzed. The chapter will have components like recommendations, findings and scope for further study.

These chapters will be followed by 'bibliography'.

Bibliography:

Primary Sources

DesaiAnita, *Fireonthe Mountain*.RandomHouse India,Noida,2008.

Joseph,Sarah. *Othappu:TheScentoftheOtherSide*. OxfordBookPress,2011.

RoyArundhati. *TheGodofSmall Things*.London:flamingo,1997.

Secondary Sources

Abbey, Edward. *Fire On the Mountain*. University of New Mexico Press, 1978.

Adhikari, Madhumalati. "Violence against Women; Inscription in Anita Desai's Novels." *Points of View*, 1998.

Agarwal, Bina. "The Gender and Environmental Debate: Lessons from India." *Feminist Studies*, 1992.

Aneel Salman, Nuzhat Iqbal. "Ecofeminist Movements—from the North to the South." *The Pakistan Development Review*, 2008.

Arundhati Roy on Fame, Writing and India. "Kyoto Journal," 2011. https://kyotojournal.org/conversations/arundhati-roy-on-fame-writing-and-india/ via @kyotojournal.

Asokan, Ratik. "The Air We Breathe: A Conversation with Arundhati Roy." *The Nation*, 17 July 2017.

Barche, G.D. "Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things: Juxtaposition and Parallelism." In *Explorations: Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things*, edited by Indira Bhatt and Nityanandan, New Delhi: Creative Books, 1999.

Barnabas, Simon. "Ayemenem and Ayemenem House: A Study of Setting of The God of Small Things." In Arundhati Roy: The Novelist Extraordinary,

edited by R.K. Dhawan, New Delhi: Prestige, 1999.

Barsamian, David. "Interview with Arundhati Roy." The Progressive, 16 July 2007.

Benoit, Madhu. "Circular Time: A Study of Narrative Techniques in ArundhatiRoy's The God of Small Things." *World Literature Written in English*, 2008, pp. 98-106.

Bhaskaran, Subhadra. "The Sweetest Song that Sings of the Saddest Tale: An Exposition of *The God of Small Things*." City Academy, n.d., Vol. 1, No. 2.

Bhattacharya, Trisha. *Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things: An Analysis and Summary*. Contributoria, 2015.

Carlassare, Elizabeth. "Socialist and Cultural Ecofeminism: Allies in Resistance." *Ethics and the Environment*, 2000.

Chaudhry, Bidulata. *Women and Society in the Novels of Anita*. New Delhi: Creative Books, 1995.

Dr. Richa. "Exquisiteness as a Weapon Against Economic Dependence: In Shobha De's Novels." *International Journal of Research in Humanities, Arts and Literature*, 2013.

Garce, John J. "The God of Small Things by Arundhati Roy." *The Guardian*, 15 May 2010.

Hopkins, Lucy. "What Will Sophie Mol Think? Thinking Critically about the Figure of the White Child in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*." *Global Studies of Childhood*, 2011.

Jackson, C. "Women/Nature or Gender/History? A Critique of Ecofeminist Development." *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 20, no. 3, April 1993.

Joseph, Sarah. *Othappu: The Scent of the Other Side*. Oxford Book Press, 2011.

King, Ynestra. "The Ecofeminist Perspective." In *Reclaiming the Earth: Women Speak Out for Life on Earth*, edited by L. Caledecott and S. Leland, The Women's Press, London, 1983.

Lewis, Tim. "Arundhati Roy: 'The Point of the Writer is to Be Unpopular'." *The Guardian*, 17 June 2018.

Markandaya, Kamala. *Nectar in a Sieve*. New York: Signet Classic, 1982.

MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers. Seventh Revised Edition. Modern Language Association of America, 2009.

Reuther, Radford R. *New Woman / New Earth*. Seabury Press, New York, 1988.

Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things*. London: Flamingo, 1997.

Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things: A Novel*. Random House Trade Paperback edition. New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, an imprint of Random House, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, 2017.

Roy, Arundhati. *The Shape of the Beast: Conversations with Arundhati Roy*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2009.

Shiva, Vandana. *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development*. London: Zed Books, 1988.

Warren, Karen J. "The Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism" *Environmental Ethics*, 1990.

Wenzel, Jennifer. "Forest Fictions and Ecological Crises: Reading the Politics of Survival in Mahasweta Devi's 'Dhowliin*Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment*, edited by Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. Print; Zed, 1993. Print.

Wollstonecraft, Mary. *The Vindication of the Rights of Women*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1975.

Research Scholar — Research supervisor

Mr. Sarfraj Sayyad — **Dr. M. D. Pathan**